

NOVEMBER 1959

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The Reformed Journal

A PERIODICAL OF REFORMED COMMENT AND OPINION

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THE WILDERNESS" *Peter L. Van Dyken*

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The Reformed Journal

A PERIODICAL OF REFORMED COMMENT & OPINION

Volume IX

No. 10

NOVEMBER 1959

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PUBLISHED MONTHLY, excepting August, by the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, at 231 Jefferson Avenue, S.E., Grand Rapids 3, Michigan. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Grand Rapids, Michigan.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: 25c per copy; \$2.50 one year; \$4.00 two years.

ADDRESS all subscriptions to Subscription Department, *The Reformed Journal*, 231 Jefferson Avenue, S. E., Grand Rapids 3, Michigan. Address all editorial and advertising communications to Managing Editor and Advertising Manager respectively.

Managing Editor: Calvin P. Bulthuis; Advertising Manager: David Wynbeek.

In Everything Give Thanks

— I THESSALONIANS 5:8

by Jacob D. Eppinga

THE President has designated the last Thursday of November as "Thanksgiving Day." But is it really that simple? Can anyone on that day turn on or turn up the spirit of gratitude as one does the heat in the house or the gas on the stove? Here is a mother who escorts her unwilling Tom Sawyer of a little boy to a party where he must play with little girls. She deposits him inside the door, muffles her voice, and speaks. "Now you enjoy yourself, do you hear?" But can little Dennis enjoy himself simply because his mother so demands? So, too, can we be thankful simply because a President so suggests? Or, what is more to the point, can we be grateful just because a holy man of God, an apostle no less than Paul, so commands and orders us to be?

Obviously we have hold of a difficulty here unless we realize that Paul is speaking to Christians; to men and women of faith. And, as creatures of faith, they are a people whose hearts are already thankfully inclined unto their God. It is this inclination that Paul would encourage with the words, "in everything give thanks . . ." His is a command to Christians that they develop and grow the grace of gratitude to life-filling proportions.

How can this be accomplished? Most Christians know the ground rules very well. At least with their heads if not always with their hearts. November, the thanksgiving month, seems a good time to call at least a few of them to mind.

A GOOD rule with which to begin is the one that would teach us to remind ourselves that gratitude is not automatically born of circumstance. One may be a child of fortune. But the spirit of thanksgiving is not — necessarily. Thankful people are not of necessity those who have the most. Possessors of health, bright minds, beautiful houses or high social positions are not always the grateful ones. Instead, these are as often found among the cabbages as among the Kings. Oftener. For gratitude springs first of all not from what one has but from what one is — a truth not always clearly remembered by Christians living in a materialistic age.

ANOTHER rule to observe, if one is to grow in the grace of gratitude, is brief and to the point. "Stay humble." This is a maxim born of the truth that pride

slayeth gratitude, as Henry Ward Beecher was often heard to say. Remember the rich fool whose story was told so well? He filled his barns and then, according to the sacred word, "congratulated himself."

How often we go and do likewise! We compliment ourselves on our abilities, our stations in life, our looks or whatever, and thus become the proud people. But proud people are never grateful people — for they can never receive as much as they think they ought to have.

BUT again. To grow in the grace of gratitude, remember to give expression to your thanks. This is most important. It was Paul's experience that the more he expressed his thanks, the more thankful he became. However, the reverse of this law is also of the Medes and Persians.

Once there were ten men all suffering with a dreadful disease. And the Master healed them, everyone. Whereupon nine of the ten said, "He knows that we are grateful." They hurried on their way, and ceased to be grateful at all. But one returned to give expression to his heart-felt thanks. And when he arose from his knees, he found himself twice as thankful as before. And so it always is. To be grateful, to continue to be grateful, "let the redeemed of the Lord say so."

AND so there are more rules — rules which if lost can always be found again provided we are willing to search for them upon our knees. For the present we mention just one more. It is as important as any of the others. To grow in gratitude, to give thanks continually and increasingly, there must be developed the habit of noticing daily blessings.

Did you ever hear the story of the day the sun forgot to rise? It was 7:00 A. M. but there was no hint of dawn. An hour later found the eastern sky yet without a glimmer of the faintest light. The local radio station, which could only broadcast from sun-up to sun-down, was therefore not able to begin its daily programs. By 10:00 A. M. some of the schools were sending their pupils home. At noon the sky was still as black as midnight. No one showed up for the Rotary luncheon downtown, even though the speaker had been recruited from many miles away. Instead, all went to their houses. On television the weatherman was knee-deep in theories, trying to explain. He said the sun would

soon appear, but at 3:00 P. M. it was still pitch dark. Members of the town's constabulary were attempting to cope with a wave of hysteria that had hit the populace. At 4:00 P. M. all the churches were filled. People prayed. And wept. Thereafter the evening hour arrived, and the bells of midnight tolled. Yet none retired. All eyes kept a vigil, staring into the inky blackness of the sky.

In the early morning hours of the next day the eastern horizon began to pale. Then hearts beat faster. And when this was followed by a glow of red, and when thereafter the tip of the wayward sun appeared,

a shout went up from all the streets and houses. Faces lifted. Total strangers kissed each other. And everywhere people wept. Laughed and wept.

They were so grateful!

And yet many had not learned their lesson well enough. For, a week later, they were taking their blessings for granted again as they had done before. Yet with a few exceptions. For some began to note their daily blessings *daily*. The sun. Health. Air to breathe. Apples on a tree. And so they came a little closer to those words of Paul, "in everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus to you-ward."

Ye Are My Witnesses

A Letter from Korea

Introduced by MILDRED ZYLSTRA

THE Christian Reformed Church has no mission station in Korea but it has witnesses there. In September, 1958, John and Julianne Steensma, Calvin College graduates, went with their children to Korea. They went under the auspices of World Church Service and are supported in part by the Plymouth Heights Christian Reformed Church.

John Steensma is Director of the Amputee Rehabilitation Project in Seoul. Losing an arm or a leg in Korea means losing all hope of living a normal life. There are three hundred amputees in Seoul alone, for many people were maimed in the war. In the Amputee Center these hopeless ones are not only provided with artificial limbs, but they are trained in some vocation which will give them a purpose in life. More important, in the chapel which is a part of the Center, they hear about Christ. "We saw in this amputee project an opportunity to witness for Christ while helping others," the Steensmas said.

Recently a hand-written notebook was found among the papers of a retired missionary who had left Korea for America. Julianne Steensma writes:

I am enclosing a copy of a letter I found in the notebook. It was written by a Korean university student who, like so many others, had lost his faith in the process of being educated. It tells a story that is common in Korea — the struggle of a reborn soul against the corruption and compromise which are an accepted part of his environment. The Oriental philosophy that honorable suicide is to be preferred to dishonorable life is evident in the thinking of this letter. The witness of the missionary's character is also an important part in it.

The letter points out so clearly (if one remembers that the boy is using a language that is foreign to him) what it means to surrender one's life to Christ here in Korea. There are so many church members here as in America who have over a long period of time become blunted to the sharp lines between good and evil. Perhaps the letter moved us as it did because we are here to see this man's struggle repeated over and over again. But I wondered if I could share it with others by means of the *Reformed Journal*.

The letter raises questions for every Christian. What do we sacrifice to follow Christ? What kind of witnesses are we?

It costs so little to be a Christian, in name at least, in America; it demands so little sacrifice. "The cross is laid on every Christian," says Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*.

The Korean writer of this letter had the courage to give up his work — which meant his earthly security — because he believed it was necessary to give it up if he were to be a true disciple.

He was drawn to Christ by the testimony of one man's life. When we have seen with our own eyes but one life guided by Christian values we know what is meant by the beauty and winsomeness of Christ.

"Ye are my witnesses," Christ said. Each one of us.

Here is the witness of an unnamed Korean Christian. One would like to know the end of his story.

This is the letter:

DEAR FRIEND PASTOR,

The whole content I am going to tell you now is rather too complicated a matter for me to be describing it orally without any stumble. So I thought it would be a better way to make a little letter to have you understand me.

This is a very serious matter for me — a matter of life and death indeed, both physically and spiritually. I hope, therefore, you will read this note with as much sympathy as you can and find some helping answers for me.

Frankly speaking, the main motive of my attending your Bible class was, at first, to learn English conversation. Perhaps this was my whole motive. This was because I believed at that time that I had scrutinized all parts of the Christian doctrine and that there remained no room to study any more about it. By my opinion, what had been shown by Christ included just as much irrationality as reasonableness, and just as much foolishness as intellectuality, and no more.

Yet, as days went by, it could not but become my secret surprise that I was gradually influenced by you. First, I remember, I was vaguely touched by your personality. I could not say why, or what it was that I call "your personality." Only I was conscious of your great sincerity above all, and it may have been this element of you that touched my heart. I felt this sincerity not from a part of you, but from your whole being.

And such impressions of you began to change my mind into being inclined to listen to your sayings more seriously and enthusiastically — not from the standpoint of learning the language, but because of something more internal and essential. Why? Because I could not fail to perceive that such a higher character as I saw before my eyes came of nothing but the very Christian culture itself. This made me think that something of which I was not aware was in Christianity. And yet, I tell you that I really had been strongly rejecting Christianity ever since the last few years following the period during which I was heartily devoted to it because of some radical (so I believed) counter-evidences. You will remember I often questioned you about this.

Nevertheless, my thought did begin to reform itself. I found something indescribably fresh in yourself. And you explained all things so understandingly that soon I found that there were many subjects in Christian theory which I had only thought to understand. What a recklessness! What a foolishness of mine that I believed I had scrutinized every corner of Christianity! Most of your words sounded quite new to my ears. But actually they were not new. Every time I listened to you or exchanged opinions with you I realized that my knowledge of something precious was being renewed.

It was thus that I determined to reinvestigate entirely all of my ideas concerning the Christianity. I restored my churchgoing again and I tried to understand what I heard

as much as I could. Above all, something happened in the church which quickened my changing. I saw a baptismal rite last Christmas day. This was a wonderful experience to me. I had never before seen a man shedding tears with pure religious impressions. And when I had once been made ready to receive them, many things around me took part in the transforming of my conceptions. During all this process you continued to influence me more and more.

One day, when I pointed out that although it was already two thousand years since the appearance of Christianity, human wickedness had not been decreased in the least essentially, nor had anyone succeeded in completing his character to perfection, and I remarked on the ultimate impossibility of the realization of the Christian doctrine, I concluded that it was fatally beyond all human ability to be perfect. I expressed my skepticism about this absolute moral imposition on mankind and proved it by the lack of the universal acceptance of religious faith. But you, Pastor, answered me as follows:

"It is not always the most important proposition to practice perfectly. Nobody at all can be perfect. There are various differences in a man's practical ability according to his inherent potentiality, circumstances, education, and a great many other elements. However, in this very fact that a man cannot be perfect, we find all the more need for the dependence upon God's benevolence, clemency, and upon the expiation by Jesus Christ. Our only duty is that we should exert ourselves to the utmost toward the standard of God, with constant repentance for our failures."

What a great joy and courage you have given to me in these words. This marked the day of the turning point of my spiritual conversion. On that day I made a new resolution. Because of your ignorance about the character of Korean society, I wish to discuss the problem here with you.

As you know, I am working formerly as a reporter for a newspaper. "Newspaperdom" is different here than it is in America where the orders and traditions are firmly settled. Here in Korea the main current is corruption. Almost one-half of the business of a newspaper is extortion by intimidation and blackmail. Such journalistic blackmail is more severe down at the provincial levels. The weak points of others are the very advantages of the reporters and the source of their gains. Nowadays, in this land, an innumerable number of crimes and evils are rampant. The newspapermen exploit endlessly these wickednesses. In present days, almost all of the Korean police or judicial officials or other government officials exploit others' weak points. Of course there are a few conscientious persons among the journalists. I, myself, had been one of those who endeavoured not to participate consciously in the wickedness. Such an individual effort,

however, was miserably feeble. The endeavor of each separate person not to become involved was quite nothing in such an atmosphere which involved all of newspaperdom. That is to say, an individual who had once become a part of this was inevitably compelled to cooperate with this evil, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly.

It was this state of things which abruptly cast itself as a new fact close up before my eyes when my soul had been awakened and was ready to start its significant new first steps. In former days this would be nothing but a flat matter of no particular significance. How could it be an important problem what kind of moral background I was situated in when I did not believe in the absolute virtue of good and evil? I would have rejected the idea that it was the one supreme duty of every human being to complete his character toward God's standard. It was still true that in my pre-anti-Christian days my earlier humanistic education and my innate *bona fides* would not have allowed me to anything unjust. Yes, that was true. And yet I was now trying purposely to scrape all conscience away from me as strongly as I had at first tried to actualize the ideal of the Holy Bible.

I became a man who resolved to struggle with all of his might against evil, as far as I was conscious of it. And now I became aware of my disgraceful past. I saw that by remaining in my position I was intentionally reconciling myself to evil. But I argued, if it were for the sake of a living, was it not possible then to reconcile oneself to evil? And yet what about the Bible, and the Christ Himself?

If it is the highest object of life to realize God's will, one cannot so reconcile evil to good. After committing and aiding the evil consciously, to ask the Lord's forgiveness by repenting before sleep, and repeating the evil the next morning and asking forgiveness again — can that be the will of God? What fearful conduct — such misbehavior with the precalculated expectation of God's forgiveness! Surely God does not offer his special favor to provide such useless, willful refuge for evil! Here I naturally reached the logical branchroad where I was compelled to determine my movement from this time on.

It was at this time that I told to you that some serious change was taking place in my mind. I could not tell the details at that time because I must decide this matter for myself before confessing it to you. I pondered upon this problem both day and night. In our present society, where every kind of employment is deadly difficult, it would be most severe self-persecution to resign my position. I did not wish to do so, but it was the only conclusion that was left to me.

It required a great deal of courage to put such a theoretical conclusion into actual practice. I made the tearing resolution, however, and without even preparing any further plans I resigned my position. This meant, in a sense, the abandonment of life itself for me. What a des-

perate predicament for a man compounded of soul and flesh to be forced to choose between the two.

Such a fate is not by any means restricted to me alone. You can hardly imagine what a great part of the people are in such a plight nowadays in Korea. In many cases the people have already blunted their moral sensibilities so that they do not feel the dilemma. But for a man who has once resolved to rebuild his character according to God's laws, such a dilemma is a most severe ordeal.

I do not intend to throw a wet blanket over the idea that a man can be what he is by the power of his personal character — that is, by his passion for truth and his strong will to accomplish what he sets out to do. But let us suppose that your personal circumstances were the same as those of the majority of our Korean contemporaries. You would have a minimum amount of material security and conditions that are conformable with everything but God's way. Your surroundings would force you to compromise with what is false; your environment would be destitute of love and understanding. If all these circumstances were yours, would your course be precisely the same as it now is?

This difficulty which I am supposing for you is not greater than the one which I must overcome. It is a torturing dilemma that is hardly bearable to human nature. It is a hard plight to be forced to choose one from two fatal necessities.

Such a difficulty would be uncommon, or a mere temporary phenomenon, in the life of an individual in a country such as America where the people inherit fortunes materially and spiritually. But it is common in our society for a man who has found a faith and is trying to live up to it. Moreover, this kind of problem is not just a temporary situation for most of us in the present Korean social actuality. I cannot say whether my present extremity will last for just a few months or for several years. Either way, I have driven my own physical existence to the edge of a precipice by making a drastic rejection of any compromise with wickedness.

Dear Pastor, I think I have now reached the point of conclusion. And here I would like to put a couple of questions to you which are my object in this letter. I have analyzed my thinking, and as a result of it I have broken away my living with my own hand. I want to be convinced that I was right in my choice. I believe I am right, no matter what terrible pain may attack me in the future. I will do everything not to bend in this resolution.

Will you say to me that you believe I was right to do as I did? I have made myself a lonely being by my action. Now, not only for my own conviction, but for carrying out such a hard resolution to the last in my helpless and isolated state, I need the support of you whom I heartily respect. What great courage would stand on my side if you would utter for me, "Yes, right you were!"

My next question is this: Is living it out absolute virtue in itself? Is it the human duty to live out at any cost until the natural death comes? Under circumstances where a man is barely able to sustain himself except by constant compromise with something unrighteous, would it not be permitted for him to choose the way of killing himself rather than yield to evil after having struggled to the extremity? Will God blame his poor weak lambs because they dared to determine to break their own beings gallantly — in nothing but the wholehearted effort to pursue after the good life when circumstances are beyond their ability to withstand?

If there are some essential virtues in physical existence itself it would be possible for a man to find some ways to keep on living even without staying with the evils. He could live by begging, or by depending upon others. In such case, however, he is not accepting any positive role

as a human creature. And that is the supreme business in life — to create good for himself and others. Is a man to live on when he becomes a trouble to other men and so descends into despicable servility?

This does not mean that I am inclined to commit a suicide. But must I not anticipate such thoughts as this? No one can assure what will come. It must be a logical conclusion that death cannot be an object of fear for a man when he has really become a believer in God. I am ready not to hesitate to break up the life for the single purpose of following the line that God has revealed, and I must not fear the death if it be necessary in this line.

Now, dear Sir, this is the end of my story. I await your answers. For the last, I hope you will remember please that your answers will exert a great influence, probably the very decisive influence, upon my future thinking and life.

“In the Style of Old Documents”

by Richard R. Tiemersma

“... *jij weet niet, hoe je namens een Koning spreken moet: dat moet plechtig, in de stijl van oude documenten . . .*”

— OKKE JAGER, *De Humor van de Bijbel*

THE invitation of the King, says one of Okke Jager's embattled evangelists, must be spoken “ceremoniously, in the style of old documents.” One can hardly suppress a sheepish smile, even in the act of wincing, as he reads that first chapter of Jager's *De Humor* . . . ; for Jager has painted such a picture of the Body of Christ awaiting the return of its Head that we who are members of that Body can hardly fail to recognize ourselves in his portrait.

There is much in that chapter that ought to be read and taken seriously by all of us. But I have again been particularly and unpleasantly reminded during these past weeks of our penchant for the “*plechtig*,” for “the style of old documents.” You see, those first freshman themes are coming in again, and I have once more committed the tactical error of assigning as a first-day exercise a theme on the subject “Why I Came to Calvin.”

I should have known better; this is now the fourth year that I have been disillusioned, but, as Pope says, “Hope springs eternal in the human breast”; and teachers, I believe, must have even more than their rightful share of this naive opti-

mism. To be sure, at the end of the semester, when one reads the final examinations and sees how the student, by a kind of perverse alchemy, has managed to transmute the pure gold of one's lectures into the baser metal of undergraduate essay, he inclines to lament with the hymnodist about “the fruitless efforts, the wasted hours . . .” But in September — well, that's another matter.

WHY does the Christian Reformed student come to Calvin for his college education? I remain comparatively unenlightened on that score. For roughly seventy percent of my students assume that they have answered the question — and, incidentally, fulfilled the requirements of the assignment — when they have penned a little homily on Christian education (the “education” frequently spelled with a capital E, presumably elevated from the ranks of more mundane words by its contiguity to “Christian”) copiously studded with *plechtig* diction. The pious phrase, couched in the language of old documents, seems to be for many of our entering students a sort of talisman to ward off too close scrutiny of the content by hard-hearted and egg-headed professors. These students articulate the *plechtig* words as though they were a shibboleth, the uttering of which guarantees safe conduct across Franklin Street and without which they will be suspected of not being of Gilead.

It is not only that this *plechtig* language is inappropriate to twentieth-century writing and speaking, although that fact in itself would seem to argue for straightforward, concise, un-archaic expression. What is even worse is that matter to which I have already alluded: too often the problem is obscured, the pertinent question unanswered, the real issue unexamined, while the *plechtig* speaker or writer takes refuge in comfortable, equally unexamined, clichés.

I hope that I shall not be misunderstood. Not every pious utterance is, *per se*, to be condemned as a "cliché." But when the utterance is used as a substitute for clear thinking, when its implications have not been examined, when no attempt is made — or intended — further to define the meaning of the term, then, I suspect, the "pious utterance" is not pious at all but, on the contrary, comes dangerously close to the impious. How often have we not heard the most profound and complex questions — What is the end of man? What is the objective of education? What is the meaning of life? — glibly, indolently, thoughtlessly, and, yes, impiously answered by "The glory of God." For that expression, perhaps even more than any other, has become a kind of shibboleth among us Calvinists.

"The glory of God," to be sure! But *how* is God to be glorified? Is the glory of God achieved by one's perching Stylites-like atop a pillar in the wilderness for some seven decades while the world gropes painfully for the light? Or is it, perhaps, better achieved by means of an active Christian life in whatever sphere God has placed one? Is God glorified in the school that pays punctilious attention to the devotional aspect of the daily program but does a less than competent job of training its students in the three R's? Is this life merely an exile to be gotten through as quickly as possible and with as little risk as is compatible with bare existence? Or is this our Father's world?

These are but a few of the painfully important questions which the Christian is called on every day to answer in one way or another. But how will they be answered if the very asking is prevented by the mouthing of a magic formula?

I COMPLAIN about my first-week students, but, really, the fault is not entirely theirs. Indeed, most of them, having for possibly the first time in their young lives been asked, "What, exactly, do you mean by that?" will be very careful not to repeat the mistake, at least in future themes, if not altogether. I repeat, the fault is hardly theirs, for most of them have been subjected to this *plechtig* lan-

guage since they were old enough to understand the spoken word. In many of our homes there seems to be a vague uneasiness about speaking of the things of the spirit, and this uneasiness is somehow palliated by one's resorting to the language of King James or the Heidelberg Catechism on those occasions when spiritual matters must be discussed. Our children are brought up on the King James Version, and many of them are encouraged to give verbatim text-book answers to the questions put to them in the catechism class.

Again I beg not to be misunderstood. I have nothing against the King James Version, provided it is properly understood by those who read it and hear it read; and anyone who has learned to read Shakespeare or even the more recent Milton should have little difficulty with the language. On purely literary grounds I consider "In this life we have three great lasting qualities — faith, hope and love" a poor exchange for "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three." It seems akin to paraphrasing Macbeth's "Can'st thou not minister to a mind diseased?" as "Can you not wait upon the lunatic?" — a bit of linguistic mayhem at which Matthew Arnold rightfully took umbrage. I shall continue to read the King James in my home and to expose my children to the lofty sonorous passages which one finds in it as in no other translation. But I hope that I shall be able to prevent giving the impression that this, and only this, is the language in which one articulates his faith or gives expression to a religious or moral concept. And I hope that I will not be satisfied with a rote-memorized answer to some problem of Christian living which confronts my offspring.

There is, of course, another extreme, that of talking to and about God as though He were a crony, a kind of boon companion. One need hardly be a dour Calvinist to be affronted by a contemporary movie queen's description of the Almighty as "a living doll." But there is, I believe, a level of language between that of old documents and that of a can-can dancer. And the language of that middle ground ought to be possible if our relationship to God and our general attitude toward religious matters resembled more closely that of Enoch, the friend of God. For "Enoch *walked* with God," and it is hard to conceive of two friends, no matter what the disparity in their rank, walking together and talking in the language of old documents. I have often thought that the Latvian folk hymn "My God and I" could have been written by Enoch:

My God and I go in the fields together.
 We walk and talk as good friends should and do.
 We clasp our hands; our voices ring with laughter!
 My God and I walk through the meadow's hue.
 My God and I — we'll go for aye together.
 We'll walk and talk and jest [Need that shock us?]
 as good friends do.
 This earth will pass and, with it, common trifles,
 But God and I will go unendingly.

I have also wished that I could have written it.

NOT only in the home is this *plechtig* language implicitly enjoined on our youth. The language of old documents pervades the whole of our Reformed community life. Read our periodicals, and see not only in the articles but in the very news items and announcements the source of my students' predilection of the *plechtig*.* Study the synodical mandates and see why my colleagues in the Languages, Literature, and Arts Division are understandably reluctant to hazard their professional reputations by serving on revision committees. Listen to the synodical examination of our candidates. (A few years ago there was one who added to almost every declaration of intent: "As much as in me lies." Not, mind you, "If I can" or "To the best of my ability" or "As well as I can," any one of which would have adequately expressed what he wanted to say, but "As much as in me lies," forsooth! For this was, after all, Synod, and there was that fine *plechtig* phrase lying handy in one of our older documents.) Observe the discussions that take place in our societies and, I am embarrassed to confess it, even among our professional educators and theologians, and see how often honest searching is discouraged by the casual injection of a "proof text" which is no proof at all because the user has neither examined its manifold implications nor even attempted to define the terms used in it.

Small wonder, then, that my students write such first themes as they do and that they often use an unexamined phrase to cover up the fact that they have failed to think the matter through. The wonder is that there are not more of such themes than there are and that most students need to have their foible pointed out only once. Nevertheless, there are, for the time being, enough; and I suspect that when next September comes around, even though I change the subject for that first theme, the language of old documents will be dragged in,

the *plechtig* word will be written, and the assignment as such will again go by the board.

It is not a pleasant prospect. But it is even less pleasant to conjecture as to the root of this habit of ours. Linguists have remarked the highly interesting phenomenon that the modern Germanic man has no ordinary language, no vernacular, with which to discuss sex. He has these alternatives: he may speak in the language of the laboratory, the clinic, the operating room, and then he will have to resort to words of Latin and Greek origin; or he may use the Anglo-Saxon terms and speak in what is considered the language of the gutter. There seems to be no middle ground. It has been suggested that this linguistic impasse results from our unwillingness — since the Middle Ages with their emphasis on mortifying the body and, more recently, the Victorian Age — to recognize the place that sex plays in the life of the normal adult. Modern man has, in a sense, compartmentalized sex and tends to speak about it only for obscene or for scientific purposes.

I sometimes wonder whether something similar may not account for our preferring documentary language for our religious expression. Have we so compartmentalized our religion that we feel uneasy speaking about it in twentieth-century English? In this connection, it is significant, I believe, that members of the more outspokenly evangelical groups exhibit an enviable ease when speaking of religious experience. There is no groping for the catechism answer, no searching for an acceptable (and, I fear, often noncommittal) traditional phrase, no resorting to the *plechtig*.

I remember once meeting a skid-row convert who, like many of us Reformed folk, associated religion with the language of King James. But he made the association with this remarkable difference: his religion had so permeated every phase of his life that he would even ask in King James to have the salt passed. On one occasion, when his pastor audibly regretted his inability to take the long walks to which he had become accustomed in his previous charge, the convert replied with a heartfelt Jacobean "Would that thou could'st!" I was young at the time and I smiled. But upon more mature reflection I respect that man. I honor him. And, in a way, I envy him. For, although I should hardly recommend his choice of diction to even the most devout of my students, I wish that his spirit were more evident among us. If it were, there would be no need for Okke Jager to satirize us in this one respect at least.

* For specific examples, see J. J. Lamberts, "Do We Dare to Use Modern English?" *The Reformed Journal*, September, 1956. The situation has not changed noticeably since Dr. Lamberts wrote the article.

Trinity Christian College*

by Arthur H. De Kruyter

Members and Friends of Trinity College:

IT IS with a deep sense of gratitude and humility that I address you this morning. There is no doubt that my position on the Board of Trustees dictates, by way of simple logic, that I call together the first faculty, administration, and student body in this joint endeavor of higher education. But at no time have I been more convinced of the propriety of my office as an ordained servant of Almighty God. My message is offered with an awareness of His presence and a conviction that this is a hallowed moment for the orthodox Calvinists of our community. There is no finer expression for this shining hour than that of the Psalmist, "This is Jehovah's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which Jehovah hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, we beseech thee, O Jehovah: O Jehovah, we beseech thee, send now prosperity . . . Jehovah is God, and he hath given us light" (Psalm 118:23-25, 27).

This is Jehovah's doing. And, like so many of His works upon earth, He has seen fit to accomplish His ends through human instrumentation. We have been the secondary means which He has been pleased to use to initiate this institution which we have cherished even before its inception. Let us never for a moment lose the consciousness of stewardship as we labor together in this service of His delight.

THE birth of Trinity Christian College has been realized through years of study, labor, and prayer. Initiated on January 7, 1953, the Association was organized on April 5, 1956. Throughout the formative stages of development, the study committee was confronted with many problems and challenging debate. From educational leaders in our circles came the searching question, "Can you justify a two-year college within the framework of the Calvinistic philosophy of education?" From the laymen came the cry for a night school, for practical

training courses, as well as for a liberal arts curriculum equal to that offered by other institutions of higher learning. From businessmen came reminders of the need for capital outlay and warnings concerning the continuing costs of operation. From ministers came admonitions regarding possible liberalism and rank academic license. Educational integration, faculty and personnel, student potential, and the sheer mechanics of buildings and housing occupied countless hours of research and calculation. Probably the greatest single subject of contemplation was the philosophy of higher education able to justify the projected two-year college and to provide guide lines for future development.

Significant pronouncements were made during these years. To the people of our constituency in Chicagoland we offered the following advantages in our first newsletter:

- (1) Put Christian college education within the grasp of more students with a relatively small increase in financial drain upon our Reformed community.
- (2) Keep our youthful students within the family fold for an additional two years.
- (3) Strengthen our church societies.
- (4) Stimulate a desire for higher education in more of our young people.
- (5) Strengthen our Reformed witness in the Chicagoland area by consolidating the now three distinct Reformed communities.

And, in addition to these five advantages, we presented the undergirding purposes of the proposed college in the same newsletter as follows:

- (1) To provide a Christian atmosphere where two years of education can be secured that will strengthen those Christian principles which guide our lives in home and church.
- (2) To introduce the junior-college student to the various fields of learning through a Calvinistic, theistic view of the world.
- (3) To develop Christian character, faith in God and in the Bible as the inspired Word of God.
- (4) To provide the first two years of a Christian higher education which will send forth intelligent Christian leadership into every area of life.

With these objectives and goals we launched the movement into the public arena in September, 1955. More recently we amplified and made more explicit

* The *Journal* is pleased to present under this title the Address delivered by the Reverend Mr. De Kruyter, Chairman of the Board, at the First Convocation of Trinity College, on October 1, 1959. The Editors and Publisher extend to the Calvinists of Chicago and vicinity their heartiest felicitations on the occasion of the establishment of a new institution of higher learning based on Christian principles and dedicated to the glory of God. Trinity now stands alongside Dordt as the second significant outpost of the Reformed cultural outreach. Upon both of these young and promising colleges we invoke God's choicest blessings.

the aims of this institution through our published statement of purpose.

Having settled these matters in our mind sufficiently for operational purposes, the matters of faculty, finance, buildings, students, and administrative organization were resolved. In retrospect we must be frank to admit that often our faith faltered, we lost sight of the power of God and wandered from His presence, and were ultimately humbled by His marvelous blessing upon our efforts. He has not erased our commitments to His people. He has granted us that for which we so earnestly prayed, "This is the day which he hath made." And now we must condense the air of our visionary heights and, with our hearts and minds solidly planted in present reality, take firm hold on matters at hand.

As of this hour, Trinity Christian College bridges the gulf from vision to fact, from hope to reality, and translates ideals into concrete struggle. The responsibilities of an institution of higher learning based upon Reformed theistic presuppositions are upon us.

My remarks in regard to the goals, ideals, and visions of Trinity are cast into two divisions of thought. The first has to do with the atmosphere and climate which we hope to establish on campus. The second has to do with the outreach of our school and the attempt to speak to our time.

CONTEMPLATING the prospective establishment of a two-year college, the late Dr. Henry Zylstra, Professor of English at Calvin College, had this to say to representatives of the study committee: "Unthinkable, no; unwise, yes. Let's be *realists* about this thing. In these institutions we set up, the textbook will supplant the library; the demonstration, the laboratory; the A. M. instructor, the Ph. D. professor; the teacher, the scholar; and the average student, the good student. The first year of work will be largely devoted to unfinished high-school business, and the second will be partly devoted to vocationally or professionally oriented work. This gives us a half year under bad conditions to do the liberal education which must vindicate the institution Calvinistically. This is too slight a medium in which to exhibit significantly a Christian reading of life."

Confronted by such an analysis and admitting the possibility of such a sub-standard institution, our sights have been persistently set toward a high-level program of academic activity. Although the realist may advance the possibility of a sub-standard institution, the probability of Trinity becoming such is, we trust, a remote one. The faculty of this

college must have basic training, skill and ability in a field of specialization as well as perspectives for integration, and a vital interest in both the subject matter and the students. Our faculty must be composed of teachers who are more than reciters of textbook material and repeaters of clichés. They must have the necessary leisure to contemplate and evaluate the various areas of study in the light of the whole. To be productive in the classroom and community, they must be free to search through every significant alternative of thought without the shackles of preconceived judgment or the fear that every new rational pursuit can only lead to error. There must be no dominant department which appoints itself to screen such endeavor, but rather an open exchange of opinion expressed in mutual confidence that the one greater goal is being served. Such confidence will only be displayed where there is no doubt of scholarly competence combined with a vital relationship to our Sovereign God through Christ Jesus. For the Christian scholar, and for the advancement of the cause of Christian higher education, there could be nothing more desirable than an academic fellowship seeking to expand the horizons of Christian cultural development.

Members of the first faculty of Trinity, I challenge you to fulfill our hopes and make real our visions. We urge you not to let the textbook supplant the library; the demonstration, the laboratory; the teacher, the scholar. We shall look to you for the development of a liberal education by means of which our future leaders will gain a Christian reading of life. We shall look for your Christian witness in matters academic and be pleased when Trinity can publish such material for the world to read.

I also challenge you, in the name of the Board, and in behalf of our entire constituency, to make this a distinctly Christian college. We expect that your leadership will be evidenced by the spirit which breathes the air of godliness and pervades the campus life. To explore creation and subdue the earth is fruitless apart from constant dedication to the Creator. These students are your trust. Love is your crowning virtue. Your wisdom is seated in godliness. May the God of all truth, whose thoughts we pursue, bless your minds and hearts in your continuing work at Trinity.

THE complementary aspect of campus life centers in the student body. To each of you, with your diversity of talents and interests, with your desire to explore intellectually both natural and spiritual revelation, with your implicit trust in this new

institution of learning made explicit by your presence here this morning, I welcome you in behalf of the Board and Curators. In no small way this college exists for you.

The student at a Christian college of the liberal arts comes with a burden. He is in search of truth — God's truth. He has a mind which is ready for the discipline of learning, for he is convinced that life is but a long process of education. He wants to search and trace the ways of God in nature and history, His dealings with man and the life of the elements. And whatever talents he has uncovered within himself, he knows they are from God and that account will be demanded when the Lord returns. As a young adult he wants to assume the responsibilities resting upon every mature Christian, that of making his calling and election sure and of living in grateful obedience for the salvation which is in Christ.

Feeling that his choice of academic activity is also in conformity with God's will for his life, the student seeks out every avenue of learning which is made available to him. Not only will he be a faithful student, but he will seek to associate with those of academic and spiritual stature so that he may profit from their virtue and learning. On the campus this takes the pattern of intimacy between professor and student. His counsellor is his friend and guide.

This will also mean that the rational and spiritual activity of the community of scholars will extend into student life. Through student organizations and in personal friendships, profitable and developmental relationships are built. It is hoped that on the campus at Trinity a healthy campus spirit will prevail — one that is joined to that of the goals of the school itself, and one which will develop personality and achievement complementary to but outside of the formal studies of the classroom. The attitudes and life commitment of the student is extremely important in the realization of the goals of the college. As you have come to us to receive academic and spiritual nurture, so we trust that you have come to us to join efforts in this initial struggle toward the ideals for which we stand. I also urge you to carry your expanding views into your homes, churches, and community. As a leader in training, use your abilities in your local young people's organization and wherever opportunity arises. Test yourself against the challenge to make others see the opportunities and wrestle with the problems of our time.

I also invite you to join the Board, the Faculty, and the Curators in the exercise of a great privilege and power which has guided us throughout. Join

us personally and collectively. Join us where we all become one and indivisible. Join us daily before the throne of God in prayer. Whether on a personal or corporate basis, work that is accomplished through and under the guidance of prayer has built and will continue to build this college. May this be the heartbeat of your life as you study on this campus.

MY SECOND division of thought has to do with the outreach of our school and the attempt to speak to our time. It has to do with the reason for the existence of Trinity in spite of the fact that this metropolitan area is already dotted with college campuses. It has to do with the justification, or rather the satisfaction we should have in seeing the opening of this college. How, under God, can we be so sure that we should sacrifice for this cause, should plead with His people for funds to maintain this work, and take these faculty members and students from the American stream of education and insulate them here in this retreat?

If the world around us were Christian or becoming Christian, there would be little that could justify the establishment of such a college as this. But the world is not Christian. Nor are our community colleges and universities. These statements I accept as truisms and will not debate. The significant thing is that from these colleges and universities and into this world is flowing a cultural stream which, characteristic of the head-waters, is also non-Christian. For us simply to merge with this stream of ideas is to dilute our message beyond recognition. Were we simply to join existing secular institutions of higher learning we should be working without companionable exchange of opinion, compatible philosophic presuppositions, or complementary areas of concern. Without the Christian college the atmosphere of secular thought would hold free reign over all discipline; and the student mind, nurtured always and only in such institutions, would for the most part never be confronted by the significant alternatives of Christian thought. Since the natural man is not inclined to humble himself in the intellectual pursuits of life any more than he is in any other activity, the normal result would be that educational competence would of necessity soon come to be defined in terms of naturalistic rationalism. Thorough-going Christian thought would eventually be silenced by the sophisticated minds of non-Christian thought, and our world would proceed to godlessness without interruption.

Because the educational institutions which are characterized by non-Christian philosophies are so

active and expansive in our generation, educators within the Kingdom of God must also be active. Because so much godlessness is being propagated in the guise of truth, the Christian must answer and challenge. Because scholarship is so revered by our contemporaries and specialization is the cultural life-blood of our day, we dare not remain silent in the field of higher education. Christian responsibility calls for an ever broadening community of committed scholarship to confront the tide of secular thought. We must arise to the occasion and continue to build institutions throughout the world which will afford academic exchange of opinion that is Christian in order to provide a defense against the intellectual attacks of the modern pagan. Ignorance and piety no longer walk together. The practice of isolation and provincial tradition are things of the past. As education rises to power and the world shrinks to neighborhood size, the citizens of God's Kingdom must not ignore the implications and resulting responsibilities. As history has proven, and as is most notably demonstrated by the Roman Catholic schools, the finest way to develop thought and to present an apology for that system of thought is by means of educational institutions.

The establishment of Trinity Christian College is at least a partial answer to that challenge. It is envisioned that, with the complementary efforts of our faculty and the efforts of our sister colleges of the Reformed community, we shall be productive of significant contributions to the Christian thought of our age. If this is not realized immediately through our published apologetic, it will be accomplished through the leadership we are training. What we are saying to the world today is that a new beach-head of Christian thought has been established. And, although the noise of our cannons is still but a faint sound on the distant landscape, it will not be long before that sound will swell to a significant roar. For such a cultural impact we are called into existence. And with God laboring in and through us, we will be more than conquerors.

ANOTHER matter comes to mind. Some may challenge our right to exist as a Reformed and Calvinistic school, a school separated from the stream of evangelical Protestantism. Why should the Reformed people of Chicago shoulder such a burden as this? Why could we not join ourselves to the Christian community and bury whatever differences there may exist in the peripheral areas that distinguish us as to systems of thought but not as to citizenship in the Kingdom of God?

The simplest and most direct answer which we can give to that question is that our convictions

will not permit us to unite ourselves to the evangelical fundamentalists. We do not share in their ideals of the Kingdom of God. We could not support their attitudes toward the social, moral, and philosophical problems of our time. Modern evangelicals have built institutions to offer personal salvation by training teachers and preachers to reach individuals. But they have been admittedly disinterested in the broad social evils of our sick world. There is no contemporary version of Augustine's *The City of God*. They have narrowed the world-changing message of the redemptive gospel into a world-resisting message. The intellectual imperative has been rejected with their rejection of the social gospel of a generation ago. Dr. Carl F. H. Henry, himself a staunch fundamentalist, has exposed the problem from within the ranks in his book, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. He states that the result of the neglectful attitude of evangelical Protestantism has meant that "no voice is speaking today as Paul would, either at the United Nations sessions, or at labor management disputes, or in strategic university classrooms whether in Japan or Germany or America. For the first protracted period in its history, evangelical Christianity stands divorced from the great social reform movement" (p. 36).

The philosophic and theological moorings of Trinity are far from such a mind of social passivity. We could not join such a tradition of non-concern. Our presuppositions will not permit us to ignore the cultural poverty of our contemporaries nor the current evils of society. Blind leaders of the blind must be exposed and corrected in every area of life. This has been our tradition and our heritage; and as we flex our muscles after many years of infancy and numerical limitations in this country, we are now seeking to raise our voice. To be joined to any Protestant tradition which has failed to confront the world with a full-orbed world and life point of view would be to confuse the very witness which we must bring.

The Calvinistic college bears a twofold responsibility in regard to the contemporary cultural scene. On the one hand, it must actively witness to the truth of the Creator by exploring and explaining every area of life in terms of the purposes of God. This message will be directed to all men. On the other hand, it will prick the already uneasy conscience of those evangelical Protestants who have neglected to influence the world and its leaders. Admittedly our sights are high and would border on the ridiculous were it not for the fact that we, like the disciples in the Upper Room, are working with the King. Scripture teaches us that our vision

must be as broad as His creation and our faith as great as His measureless promise.

BEFORE I conclude my address, I would like to share a few thoughts in regard to the establishment of Trinity in particular. From the very initiation of the movement, the idea of a college of this type in Chicago has captivated the imagination. In the crossroads of the nation; on main street, U. S. A.; in the heart of an academic melting pot; in the greatest convention city of the country: this is where we have located a college! We can debate issues, challenge opinion, and launch our ideas in the midst of one of the most colorful academic scenes in the land. What is to prevent us from attending the lectures of world-famous scholars visiting local campuses? Or, better still, what is to prevent us from inviting them to Trinity where they can be exposed to and challenged by the Christian ideal? The broad area of exchange of thought can give wings to the mind as one contemplates the many advantages in the location of our school.

Related to these opportunities is the significant public relations field. When something of importance happens on this campus, be it a noted visitor, or achievement in an academic field, we have a press that is read across the country, the radio, and Channel 11 TV which reaches millions. Communications are significant in influencing culture and thought, and we must not ignore them. Moreover, the Calvinists of Chicago are past due in sharpening a Christian conscience and reaching beyond the concentrated areas where our own people reside. It is both remarkable and disconcerting that the 35,000 conservative Calvinists living in this metropolitan area have done so little.

Trinity can also serve as a major support to the growing interest in a Calvinistic University in our land. Much has been written and said about this matter; but, as yet, there is no united effort across the nation for such an institution. The University idea will grow when there is a favorable climate in which it can live. As a liberal arts col-

lege, and not as a terminal education unit in the Christian school system, Trinity will feed rather than destroy the hope and ambitions of those who share the vision. It may even be that, since many leaders feel that a Calvinistic University should be society owned and not a denominational school, the educators of Trinity will be called upon to spearhead the movement.

And, finally, looking at the possibilities of service to our own Reformed community here in Chicago, there is an ever widening area of activity. Trinity can become a cultural boon by providing leadership in the arts and sciences, by offering lectures, debates, and panel discussions or sponsoring musical programs of inspiration and aesthetic beauty. An evening school, offering non-credit courses, has been repeatedly requested by our constituency. Through student effort it could offer after-recess programs for church societies and other Kingdom organizations which would stimulate discussion and interest in matters of theoretical or applied truth.

If the Lord has prospered us until now, He has but given us the basic ingredients for a far broader field of labor. I have mentioned but a few of these blessings and their attending responsibilities. What we shall do with them in the future is yet to be seen. Time will tell what kind of institution this will be. Now we will return to our duties. There is almost a comic discrepancy between the high issues we have been discussing and the mundane task of the classroom and daily routine. It is well that it should be so. It will weed out the weak and merely adventuresome people from those who are humble and solid in their faith and share in this noble vision. And, as we turn to our continuing labors, let us pay earnest heed to the power of every Christian life: "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus . . . God shall supply all your need according to his riches . . . Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

The Concept of Infallibility in the Christian Tradition

by Leonard Verduin

In the areas served by this journal there has of late been considerable discussion about infallibility. The question as to infallibility is not a new issue, however. It is as old as Christianity itself. It is so old that one can with complete propriety speak of a tradition concerning the matter. In this article we wish to explore this tradition of infallibility somewhat.

We begin with an examination of the tradition of infallibility as it runs in the Roman Catholic version of Christianity. We do this because of the fact that in spite of certain differences between infallibility in this camp and in ours there are striking similarities.

The big difference in these two streams of thought and the construction given to the idea of infallibility in them is that in the Protestant stream the Voice that predicates infallibility is a Voice that has now ceased; in the Roman Catholic stream that same Voice continues to speak. Just as for Protestants the sacrifice of Christ is a once-and-for-all thing that has reached its conclusion whereas in the Catholic vision this sacrifice is elongated into the present, so also in the matter of an infallible Voice does Protestantism hold to a Speech that has been concluded, with the completion of the canon, whereas Catholicism holds that this Speech continues and reaches into the present.

For this reason, in the Catholic vision the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture leads at once to the idea of the infallibility of the pope.

THE idea of papal infallibility has been in the air for a long time already; but it was formulated and given official status in 1870, when it was formulated in these words: "We teach . . . that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra* . . . possesses infallibility . . . to define the Church's doctrine with regard to faith and morals."

It should be noted that the infallibility ascribed to the pope has certain clearly expressed delimitations.

First of all, there is the delimitation of "*ex cathedra*" (from the chair). This delimitation restricts the pope's alleged infallibility to the things he says after he has for this purpose officially taken to his papal chair or throne. What the pope says

elsewhere is not accompanied with the assurance of infallibility.

Secondly, there is the delimitation suggested by the words "the Church's doctrine." This delimitation provides that the pope speaks infallibly only if and when he formulates or elucidates or interprets that which is already in the Church's possession. The pope can only enlarge upon an already existing deposit. He cannot make infallible pronouncements upon *new* matters. The subject matter on which the pope speaks infallibly is restricted to what has already been broached.

A third delimitation is to be noted, one that is especially pertinent to our present purpose. It is contained in the words "with regard to faith and morals." This narrows the alleged papal infallibility significantly. It implies that if the pope were to presume to say what the other side of the moon looks like he would be going beyond his competence if he claimed infallibility for his assertions. His alleged infallibility pertains only to matters of faith and morals. This particular delimitation has been put in the following words, by Auguste Boudinon, professor of Canon Law at the (Catholic) University of Paris: "Infallibility is the guarantee against error, not in all matters, but only in matters of faith and morality; everything else is beyond its power . . ."

Ostensibly infallibility is in the Catholic vision a feature of the landscape on the plateau of faith and morality — and on it only. It has no reference to such other plateaus as that of abstract history or science. This delimitation of the pope's infallibility hangs together with the conviction that the ancient oracle, to which the pope must hold himself as we saw a moment ago, is similarly confined to the plateau of faith and morality. If the *ancient* oracle were conceived of as speaking infallibly with no delimitation, then it would be wholly inconsistent to introduce the delimitation when speaking of the *contemporary* oracle. Papal infallibility is infallibility with delimitation because revelation *per se* has the same delimitation. So Catholic thinking runs.

COMING now to the Protestant tradition of infallibility, we find very much the same situation. Here

also the expression "of faith and morals" is heard whenever the matter of infallibility is broached. Here also infallibility is a phenomenon occurring on the plateau of faith and morality. For example, the Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church requires of all whom it ordains to office the confession that "the Scriptures are the infallible rule of faith and conduct." This language, so very similar to that of the Catholic tradition, takes us at once to the plateau of faith and morals. Generations of ministers, not only in modern times but also in the golden age of Presbyterianism, have been required to confess to the idea of an infallible Scripture — but always with the delimitation of "of faith and conduct."

In the Presbyterian tradition, as well as in the Catholic, this delimitation grows from the conviction that it is on this plateau that the Scriptures speak. Because the Bible moves on that plateau, and on it only, therefore the Westminster divines in their delineation of infallibility confined it to that selfsame plateau. They said nothing about any presumed infallibility elsewhere because as they saw it the Bible does not speak elsewhere.

Coming still closer to home, we find pretty much the same situation in the Reformed tradition. Here the Scriptures are constantly spoken of as a divine communication in matters of faith and morality. In the Belgic Confession for example (from the French original of which we will be translating) we read, in Article II, of a "second Book" in which God reveals himself (that is, the Bible) in regard to "al that is needful for us to know in this life with a view to His glory and our salvation." Here we are right back on the plateau of faith and morality; on this plateau lies every distinguishing feature of "Book Two."

In Article III of this Confession we read that "men, pressured by the Spirit of God, spoke; and then afterward, because of the unusual care which our God had touching us and our salvation, He commanded His servants to put His Oracle to writing." Here again we are led to the plateau of faith and morals where the total concern of the Oracle is located.

Article IV tells that against this Oracle "there is nothing with which to counter," meaning to caution us that on this plateau of faith and morals the Word of God must be given the undisputed right-of-way.

Article V, continuing in the same vein, says: "We take these aforementioned books to be holy and canonical unto the ordering, the basing, the establishing of our faith, believing without a doubt all the matters contained in them" — matters that lie

on the plateau of faith and morals, which are the stock in trade of the Holy Scriptures.

Article VI, which speaks of the Apocrypha, tells us in precisely what way these books belong to a lower order: "They do not at all have the power or the strength on which to base any matter of faith or the Christian religion; and they are certainly unable to lessen the authority of the other sacred books." On the plateau of things of the faith and of conduct the Apocrypha are deficient and for that reason the canonical books must be given the right-of-way over them.

And finally, Article VII dings it into our ears for the final time that we are "to believe that this Holy Scripture contains perfectly the divine will, and, that all that which men ought to believe unto salvation is taught there adequately. For since the entire manner of service which God asks of us is there described at length . . . men may not teach otherwise than has been taught in the Holy Scripture — not even if it were an angel from heaven . . ."

The reader will have noticed that the Belgic Confession incessantly locates the predications of the Holy Scriptures on the plateau of faith and morals. This must be kept in mind when we read there that "we reject with all our hearts all that does not comport with this infallible rule." The scene is here also, and still, laid on the plateau of faith and morality — as is the case with the passage from I John (to which the Confession turns for authorization at this point) about not receiving into our house "him that does not bring this doctrine." We are at this juncture (the only one where the word "infallible" occurs in this creedal statement) still on the plateau of faith and morals. To quote this assertion about "this infallible rule" as though we at this point descend from this plateau is to take liberties with the text.

Nor may it be overlooked that the assertion in which the expression "this infallible rule" occurs *begins* with the word "Therefore," a word that binds that which follows to that which has gone before. And what is it that has gone before? The assertion that "all men are of themselves liars and vainer than vanity itself." The argument, then, is that since the cogitations of men in regard to faith and morality are vain and misleading, therefore we reject with all our heart whatever the human spirit has put forth that does not agree with "this infallible rule." The tension is a tension between human predication on the plateau of faith and morals versus divine predication on this plateau. The "infallible rule" is so called because it, unlike all human predication in the matter, does not mislead. Happily there is complete unanimity

among us at this point. All of us say, and with conviction, that if a man accepts all that the Bible has to say on the plateau of faith and morality, and then acts accordingly, then that man will never land at the wrong address.

The delimitation of "of faith and morals" results from the Bible's own idea of itself. It sets the pace for this delimitation. We shall marshal a few passages from the Bible by way of illustration.

Palm 19 is one of my favorite prooftexts in the matter. It begins by telling us that the heavens declare the glory of God all right but that the "Law of Jehovah" (which is thrown on the screen at verse 8) is more excellent. The excellency of this "Law of Jehovah" consists in this that it "converts the soul," is redemptive in its mission. What is this but the declaration that the thing that happens when we move from the plateau of general revelation (of which the first seven verses speak) to the plateau of special revelation, is that we by so doing climb upon a new and different plateau, the plateau of faith and morals? This is the Bible's habitat — according to Psalm 19. Here all its excellencies lie, all its distinguishing features, also that of infallibility.

Another passage is the oft-quoted verse from II Timothy, the one about "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" or "is God-breathed." This passage, it must be observed, leads without a halt to the further statement that this God-breathed thing "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." This is language that gives rise at once to the expression "of faith and conduct" — useful "for doctrine, for reproof." To take simply a piece of this testimony of the Scriptures, its "God-breathedness," and to transfer this portion to any and every plateau is very bad exegetical form — in view of the fact that the text itself makes it unmistakably clear that the predication in question was made on the plateau of faith and morals.

THAT the Holy Scriptures speak with infallible authority on the plateau of faith and morals has, to the best of the present writer's knowledge, been denied by no one in the Christian Reformed community. Certainly it has not been denied in the *Stromata* pieces which gave rise to the present discussions. It has not been denied, but rather ardently confessed, by the president of Calvin Seminary.

All who have thus far expressed themselves anent infallibility have stuck quite faithfully to the tradition of infallibility. All have agreed that "the

Bible is the infallible rule of faith and conduct." All who have expressed themselves as to infallibility have done so in the ancient idiom; that is, they have spoken of infallibility on the plateau of faith and morals; they have spoken of infallibility delimited as it has always been delimited.

It seems, however, that there are some who wish to drop now the traditional delimitation. There are those it seems for whom infallibility in matters of faith and morals is not enough. What has hitherto been predicated with reference to the plateau of faith and morals, they propose now to predicate of all, or at least some, other plateaus. They clamor for a formulation of the doctrine of infallibility in which every delimitation has been excised.

It is, of course, quite possible that the tradition of infallibility has hitherto been in error; it is theoretically possible that it was a mistake ever to have introduced any delimitation at all. And if there are people who hold that such is the case it is their prerogative to speak their mind and argue their case. We are ready to listen to such argument. And if they can make good their case that we must now begin to speak of infallibility without delimitation, then we shall move to that new position with them. But, and this must be said with emphasis, the burden of proof is upon them and not upon him who is satisfied with the traditional formulation, which introduced a delimitation, the delimitation that has hitherto been a part of the Church's conviction in regard to infallibility.

The Christian Reformed Synod of 1959 has declared that "it is inconsonant with the creeds to declare or to suggest that there is an area of Scripture in which it is allowable to posit the possibility of actual historical inaccuracies." If by this statement Synod wishes to say that the delimitation of "of faith and conduct" is from now on contraband, then Synod is introducing an innovation. This innovation might possibly be in itself right and proper; it is theoretically possible that it was a mistake in the tradition of infallibility to operate with the oft-mentioned delimitation; the thought can be entertained that the time has indeed come for us to predicate of all plateaus that which has hitherto been predicated solely of the plateau of faith and morals. But if it is indeed Synod's intention to bind us to the deletion of the ancient delimitation, then it owes it to us to argue its point — with an argument as close and as cogent as would be required in the Catholic fold if it were there proposed to strip the doctrine of papal infallibility of its delimitation. Such an argument the present writer has not been able to find in print, neither in the Acts of Synod nor in any Report.

The Distortion of Denominational Ideals: Dogmatism

by Simon J. De Vries

THE Christian Reformed Church has high respect for its dogma, and this is good. We mean by dogma the authoritative doctrine of the church, particularly as it appears in confessional statement. The necessity and the value of dogma within the church are not to be questioned. It has proved itself useful for several purposes; as a bond of unity within the ecclesiastical fellowship, as a witness to the world, as a systematization of Scriptural truth, and — a purpose which is too easily forgotten — as a guide to continuing theological growth. Implied in the very definition of dogma is the fact that it is derived from Holy Scripture. It is not intended to supplant or stand above the Bible, but rather to serve the Bible as its auxiliary, adapting its truths to the needs of the living church.

Dogmatism is the absolutization of dogma. Respect for dogma becomes distorted into dogmatism when it goes out of bounds, when dogma is made more authoritative than the Scriptures, or when it stands above the Bible and controls its interpretation.

WHEN we speak of dogmatism we raise a problem with which the church has wrestled throughout the ages. This is the problem of religious authority. Now the fact is that the problem of religious authority is not so simple as many would like it to be.

The absolute authority is God Himself. This is an axiom. But God no longer addresses Himself immediately to us as He once did to the prophets and through His Son. Mystics and spiritualists who continue to expect this immediate contact with God, and who audaciously attempt to approach God along a private pathway, are in peril of blundering into the vagaries of subjectivism.

If there is now a supreme religious authority upon earth — and we cannot believe that God has left His people without an effective guide — this must be something that He has given men to represent Him and to convey His will. Apart from the answer of the spiritualists, Christianity has located this authority in two separate entities, the church and the Bible. Roman Catholicism has accorded priority to the church, putting it above the Bible,

but the Protestant Reformation has reversed this, raising the Bible above the church. As Calvin declares in his *Institutes* (I, vii, 1-3), the church does not give the Scriptures their authority; it only witnesses to the authority that they already have. It must itself bow before the authority of the Word of God.

The problem of religious authority becomes more complicated when dogma is introduced. Dogma possesses a mixture of ecclesiastical and Scriptural authority. It is supposed to be based upon the Bible (at least in the Protestant tradition), and yet it is the church's product. Actually, the church accepts its dogma as Scriptural solely upon its own authority. No one should attempt to disguise this fact. There is nothing wrong in it, so long as we are clear concerning what the situation really is. The church has both the right and the obligation to declare in dogmatic form what it believes to be the truth of Scripture. But constantly it must lay its dogma alongside the measuring rod of Scripture, not only willing but even eager to correct it wherever it may appear to be out of conformity with the supreme standard.

WHAT is here stated is fully in the Reformed tradition. Although Calvin (not to mention the other Reformers) respected theological systematization and creedal expression, he never would have dreamed of putting these things ahead of Scripture. Most of us honor Calvin chiefly for his great systematic work, the *Institutes*, but we should also remember that he was pre-eminently a Biblical theologian and a faithful exegete of the Scriptures. He spent more time and energy on his great series of commentaries than on any other project. Some have maintained that Calvin's great doctrines, such as election and divine sovereignty, are based upon speculation; but in fact he taught these truths only out of obedience to the teaching of the Bible as he understood it. He had no desire to spin out a clever system, but only to make clear the Word of God.

Now in saying this of Calvin I do not wish to suggest that he perfectly lived up to his ideal, nor do I think that any mortal man has accomplished this. Perhaps Calvin was only more aware of the

problem than many others have been. The ideal has often been lost, and small wonder! Protestant theologians are faced with the task of stating the teaching of Scripture with complete honesty, balance, and objectivity, and yet they are ever in danger of injecting their own human limitations into their interpretation. Even when the church collectively states its interpretation of Scripture in the form of creedal confession, it is not free from this peril. One would really need the wisdom of Christ Himself to draw up the perfect creed or the perfect system of dogma.

The serious theologian knows that he is obliged to observe three important rules as he attempts to transcribe the teaching of the Bible into doctrinal form. First, he must prepare himself thoroughly in linguistics, ancient cultures, exegesis, and related disciplines. Second, he must rigidly apply sound principles of hermeneutics. And third, he must remain continually aware of the fact that his interpretation is at best strictly relative. He is only trying to listen to the Bible, letting it speak to him not as a dead letter but as the living Word of God. When he thinks he has understood, he may lay out in systematic form his apprehension of its truth, but always with the realization that he may have misunderstood somewhere, always with the willingness to go back to the Bible and inquire of it again. The mistake that he must at all cost avoid is to ignore some of the phenomena of the Bible which he cannot logically accommodate in order to build up his own neat scheme of what he thinks the Bible ought to teach.

I AM rehearsing all this because I think that a Bible-dominating dogmatism has sometimes exerted an unwholesome influence in our denomination. When we study a problem, we often start by breaking our heads over an involved series of dogmatic propositions and deduce from them the position we ought to take. Then, almost as an afterthought, we concern ourselves with "exegesis" of Scriptural material. Since we have already made up our minds about the question, it is not surprising that we are usually able to find Scriptural support for our opinion.

The complicated problem of remarriage after unbiblical divorce was handled that way. For years it was held that such a remarriage was a "constant living in adultery." On what grounds? When we finally got around to examine what the Bible really did say about it, we discovered that it provided no clear grounds whatever. It is at least to our credit that once we understood this, we did not

try to maintain the old position any longer, despite the qualms that many of us had.

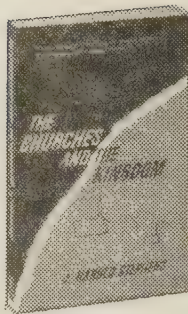
It must be confessed, too, that the typical Catechism sermon makes scant reference to Scripture except for corroboration by way of the proof-text method. This method is extremely employed in the training of our ministers. All who have attended synodical and classical examinations of candidates will have noticed the great disproportion between the time spent on soliciting the routine answers in dogmatics and the time spent on actual knowledge of the Bible. If a candidate can recite a few proof-texts in the appropriate places, it is generally assumed that his training in theology is complete. Should we not acknowledge that this practice of bringing in a few random texts here and there to bolster our dogma is a degradation of the dignity of the Bible?

The recent handling of the question of Biblical inerrancy would also seem to show that we find it much easier to resort to dogmatic declaration than to subject ourselves anew to the discipline of the Holy Scriptures. Although I may have missed something, I have nowhere seen a serious effort to deal directly and open-mindedly with the specific Biblical data which evoked the questions raised. The articles which have appeared on the subject have devoted themselves to explaining what the creeds have said and what the opinion of various theologians has been. But there has nowhere been a new and objective consideration of the Scriptural phenomena themselves. It would seem that in the presence of vexing problems we have simply appealed to the authority of dogma.

Moreover, our latest Synod has hastened to adopt, without recommending it to the scrutiny of the churches, still another dogmatic statement on the subject of inspiration and infallibility. It is true that Synod did appoint a committee to study the "discrepancies" themselves, but we wonder how this committee can consider them with the objectivity that the dignity of Scripture requires, now that the church has virtually told it how the problem must be solved.

WE ought to pray that as our church seeks a more complete doctrine of Scripture, it will not allow its dogma to run ahead of, or behind, the Bible. The Bible is the highest authority. Our dogma must ever be re-examined to make certain that it really agrees with and adequately articulates this ultimate standard. Only so will we escape the perils of dogmatism.

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"As Moses Lifted Up the Serpent in the Wilderness"

by Peter L. Van Dyken

The title of this piece is a quotation from Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus. It refers to a historical event, quite familiar to us. After thirty-eight or thirty-nine years of wandering in the wilderness without reaching their goal, the children of Israel became once more rebellious against the Lord and Moses. The specific cause for their uprising was that they had to make a long detour around the land of Edom because the Edomites refused them passage through their land. They said to Moses: "Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread [manna]."

It is not hard to understand that the people became discouraged by these long wanderings. But we cannot justify it, for they had brought it on themselves by their unbelief. This time the Lord punished their rebellion by sending fiery (poisonous) serpents among them which bit them, so that many died. When the people repented, Moses prayed for them and God heard it. He told Moses to make him a serpent of brass and put it on a pole. And if any man were bitten he would be healed when looking at the brazen serpent.

Was there power in that brazen serpent to heal the people from their poisonous bites? Not at all. The power was of God. But the condition of God was that they had to look to that serpent on the pole in order to be healed.

If any were bitten and refused to look at what God provided for a cure, he would die. Therefore not inability, but refusal through unbelief would be their death.

It is to this incident that Jesus refers in His discourse with Nicodemus. And He draws a parallel between the lifting up of the serpent by Moses and His own being lifted up on the cross. And the purpose of His being lifted up? "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." The picture is not perfect as regards the source of the healing power. For the Israelites there was no healing power in the serpent on the pole. The healing power was of God and it was unmerited, but it required faith on the part of the subjects.

When Jesus was nailed to the cross He was lifted up. But the cross was a symbol of the curse resting on humanity, being bitten by the poison of sin. And the cure was provided by Jesus Himself as He was lifted up and bore the shame for the people to heal them from the poison of sin and to provide for them eternal life. And in order to attain to this the condition is the same as it was with the children of Israel: he who looks at the cross of Christ and believes on Him who hung thereon shall be healed from the poison of sin, shall be rescued from perishing and shall have eternal life.

The Israelites did not heal themselves from the serpent's poison by looking at the brazen serpent. Man does not save himself from the curse of sin by looking at the cross of Christ. It is God who pardons sin and gives eternal life. The requirement is faith; faith including repentance. When Jesus began His career He said: "Repent ye and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Paul said to the jailer at Philippi: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." And to the Athenians he said: "God now commends all men everywhere to repent." It must not only be a believing with the mind, by which we believe it to be true what God says to us in His Word. But we must believe with the heart, as Phillip said to the eunuch:

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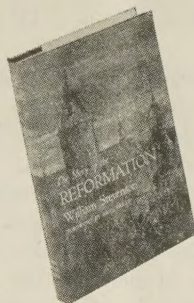
"If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest [be baptized]." We must appropriate to ourselves that which Christ has done for us on the cross.

The question is: Can man do this and be saved? The children of Israel could look at the serpent and they were healed. So sinners can look at the cross of Jesus and be healed. The condition is: a realization of the deathly sting of sin, and a heartfelt desire to be relieved therefrom. To such Jesus says: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Man must come, Jesus will give the rest. And the Father promises: "All that come unto me, I will in no wise cast out." And Jesus says: "Seek and ye shall find; ask and ye shall receive; knock and it shall be opened unto you."

Is there any more assurance necessary to prevent man from hiding behind his so-called inability? Nothing prevents man to come to the cross, except his *unwillingness*, caused by an unrepentant heart. All who come to the cross, believing that Jesus died for them, will be saved.

We see therefore that we must exercise faith before we realize that faith is a gift of God. Is it not true, then, that man must be "born again" of the Holy Spirit, before he can even seek salvation? Indeed, that is true. Jesus also tells Nicodemus: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." But as we do not know at what time a child is begotten in the natural life so we do not know when the Holy Spirit does implant or has implanted this seed of the new life in the heart of man. God does not reveal to us when this takes place nor whom He has elected and predestinated unto eternal life. That is God's secret, which He never reveals to anyone except we first seek and find Him. It is when that seed of regeneration has bloomed out into the new life that we get the assurance of the Holy Spirit that we are children of God and heirs of eternal life. So our election is proven to us by our coming to Him.

That order is never reversed. Frequently the case of Lydia is quoted, one who worshipped God and whose heart the Lord opened that she gave attention to the word spoken by Paul. It is indeed true that God opened her heart so that she listened and believed. But her case is not an isolated or ex-



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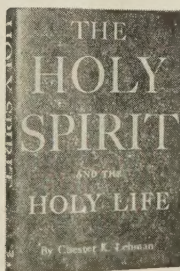
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ceptional case. Fact is that no man has ever listened to the gospel of Christ, in the sense of giving heed and bearing fruit, except God opens the heart first. But of *this man is not conscious*. As Lydia was not aware of the fact that God opened her heart, but that she came to listen to Paul because she was interested, which resulted in her believing in Christ for salvation, so any sinner must give heed to the call of the gospel, and those who hear and believe prove that God had opened the heart. Never has anyone who in sincerity tried to find God, to be reconciled to Him, and who sought in the way of Scripture, been rejected. Neither will eternity prove that some were lost through unbelief whom after all God had elected. The end will show that the number who have sought and found salvation will tally exactly with the number of the elect.

But since the election belongs to the secret things of God and we have His revealed will to guide us, we must come, we must repent and believe — and we find that we can if we do. For "God's commandings are God's enablings" (Spurgeon). However, man is not conscious of God's work in him until he comes in obedience to His command and invitation. All passivity and waiting for a special call is definitely excluded. The call is there all the time

and man is inexcusable if he does not give heed.

We arrive therefore at this conclusion, that in the consciousness of man, man must take and does take the first step on the way of salvation. Let me repeat that: *In the consciousness of man, man takes the first step*. When God gives him the assurance and the consciousness of the new life through the Holy Spirit, he then realizes that after all it was God who led him to the fountain of living waters and also caused him to drink.

As the poet sings: "I sought the Lord and afterward I knew He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me. It was not I that found, O Savior true. No, I was found by Thee." It is rather significant that some preachers put all the accent on the words: "afterward I knew He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me." Or on the following line: "It was not I that found . . . No, I was found of Thee." They put all the emphasis on what God does, but forget the first four words: "I sought the Lord." They do not seem to realize that there can be no "afterward" except there first be "I sought the Lord."

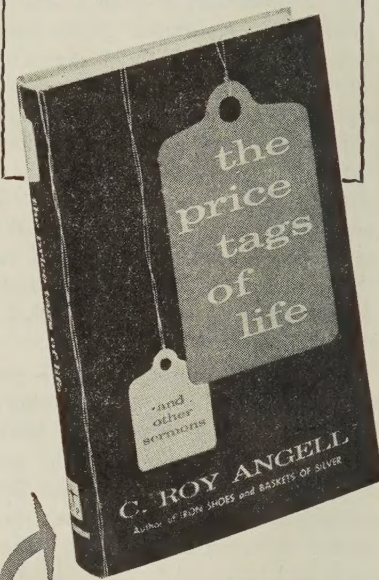
I would warn anyone who goes to sleep on the much cuddled pillow of his inability, that he may never wake up till he finds himself in hell. "Now is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation."

Thoughts for this Time of Year

It is but right that our hearts should be on God, when the heart of God is so much on us. If the Lord of glory can stoop so low as to set His heart on sinful dust, methinks we should easily be persuaded to set our hearts on Christ and glory, and ascend to Him, in our daily affections, who so much condescends to us. Christian, dost thou not perceive that the heart of God is set upon thee, and that He is still minding thee with tender love, even when thou forgettest both thyself and Him? Is He not following thee with daily mercies, moving upon thy soul, providing for thy body, preserving both? Doth He not bear thee continually in the arms of His love, and promise that all things shall work together for thy good, and suit all His dealings to thy greatest advantage, and give His angels charge over thee? And canst thou be taken up with the joys below and forget thy Lord who forgets not thee? Unkind ingratitude! When He speaks of His own kindness for us, hear what He says: 'Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.' But when He speaks of our regards to Him, the case is otherwise: 'Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number.' As if He should say, 'You will not rise one morning and forget your vanity of dress; and are these of more worth than your God, of more importance than your eternal life? And yet you can forget these day after day.' Let us not give God cause thus to expostulate with us. Rather let our souls get up to God, and visit Him every morning, and our hearts be towards Him every moment.

—RICHARD BAXTER

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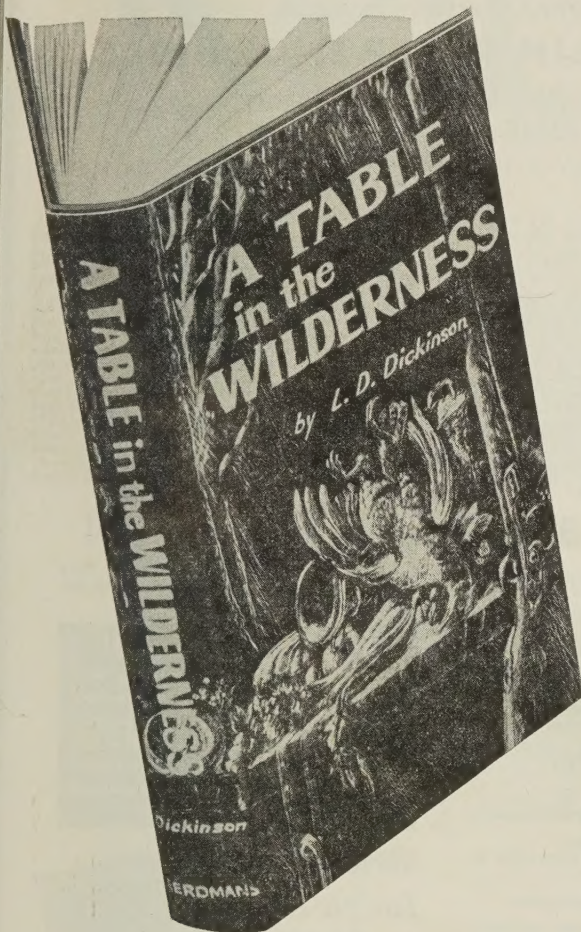
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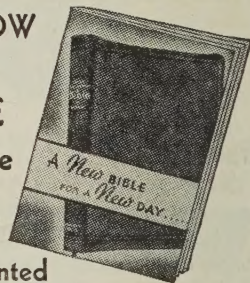
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